DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 158 537 EC 111 938

AUTHOR Menschel, Robert S.
TITLE Deafness and Its Impact.
PUB DATE Jun 78
NOTE 5p.; Paper presented at the World Congress on Future Special Education (First, Stirling, Scotland, June 25 - July 1, 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Aurally Handicapped; *Deaf; *Personal Adjustment; *Social Attitudes; *Social Development

ABSTRACT

The author, a deaf physicist, describes the effects of social attitudes on his development, education, and career. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

#95-S

23/ #14

AH

- ED158537

DEAFNESS AND ITS IMPACT

ABSTRACT

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Robert S. Menchel

Xerox Social Service Leave Program with the
American Association for the Advancement of
Science, Office of Opportunity in Science.

The attitudes of society toward those with the handicap of deafness is such that the ability and development of the individual is affected negatively.

In this paper, a brief description of the impact of deafness on the author's social development, career, and community involvement is given.

It is felt that the prevailing attitude of society in the past was to associate deafness with the inability to learn. As a result of this attitude, barriers are placed in the individual's path that hinder his obtaining a place of equality in our society.

Senior Physicist
193 Baird Rd.
Pennfield NY.
14526

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

CEC

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM"

FC 111938

Deafness And Its Impact

What kind of affect does a handicap, especially the invisible handicap of deafness have on one's life? This question perhaps has as many answers as there are people with this handicap. Therefore, speaking from my own experience I'll try and show you what our world is like and the impact this handicap has had on my life.

First, it is necessary to have a brief description of my career and life up to this point. I have been deaf for thirty-four years, due to spinal meningitis at the age of seven. Today, I have earned an AAS degree in Mechanical Technology and a B.S. degree in Physics. I am married to a normal-hearing wife to whom I owe much of what I have accomplished. I have four "normal" children. There are a lot more details but to save time, I'll forego them for now.

It would seem that my life has been fairly normal, my handicap notwithstanding. However, there is another side of the story. This is how society looks at the deaf, their intelligence capacity and the impact such stereotyped ideas have had on my life.

There is a prevailing attitude in our society that associates deafness with low intelligence. There is also an attitude of what we perhaps should define as fear. The fear of not understanding the handicapped person or being understood by them. These two attitudes have had quite an impact on my life, my education, my career and my relation to the community. In this paper, I will try to show how these attitudes have affected me one way or another.

With the onset of deafness, the normal education I was receiving came to an end and I entered the educational system of the deaf as it existed in 1940. There was little consideration for preparing a deaf child for a college education much less a high school education. The career opportunities outlined for us were printing, woodwork and other limited areas. This stereotyped thinking seriously damaged my elementary education so I was unprepared for high school. High school was not much better. The attitude that existed was that I did not have the learning ability of a hearing student and therefore would not learn academic courses. In fact, a math teacher had me removed from her class on the grounds that she could not

teach a deaf student in a normal classroom and did not want to spend extra time. Thus, my education was seriously affected by these attitudes and I had to make up, later in my life, courses that I should have obtained in high school.

I must admit at this point that my parents were very strong willed and would not accept my handicap as a factor in limiting my future. They fought very hard to have me admitted to college. I owe much of my success to the encouragement my parents gave me and feel it is important that a handicapped child get this encouragement from their parents.

Due to my lack of the required courses, admittance to a four-year college was nonexistent. Therefore, I attended a two-year community college where I earned an AAS degree in mechanical technology and no job prospects at all. I feel that part of the reason I did not gain employment was due to my handicap, since I carried high grades and completed the required courses. Thus, the second affect of my handicap was now becoming evident.

I decided the only path open to me was a four year college education. This was easier said than done. First, I was rejected by nearly every college I applied to, due to my high school background, even though I had obtained an AAS degree at an accredited community college. Second, I was finally accepted at one college with very special conditions imposed upon my admittance. Thus, again, the effect of my handicap showed that to gain what a non-handicapped person can accomplish in a normal way, the handicapped individual must go to great lengths and overcome many barriers to gain the same goal.

Going through college in those days was very difficult for a deaf student with no support service. I learned that I had to put in double the study time a non-handicapped student did. I had to overcome the special conditions imposed on me. In this situation, I think one learns to grin and bear it if he feels the goals he is aiming for are worthwhile. I could write a book on the barriers I overcome to get my degree, but I'll leave them out. I'm sure we have heard many of the same stories. I will say, however, that there were times when I was ready to quit.

It is also interesting to note that the deaf individual in a hearing high school or college is a social outcast. The social life I had in high school did not exist. Dates, parties, being invited to friend's homes, the movies or whatever a normal teenager goes through do not apply to the deaf teenager in a normal high school. College was a little better, but I more often than not was studying on a Saturday night or drinking by myself rather than on a date. We cannot escape the fact that society does not think we, the deaf, can succeed, and therefore when it comes to social contact, the parents of the young women would rather she dated someone who would "amount to something."

Completion of college would normally lead to a job. In my case, it led to nothing but letters of rejection, 62 in all. I still remember one that read "You were not hired, primarily because of your hearing and speech defect." So while my classmates got jobs I applied for, I had to accept the help of a friend to get a low paying job with the Federal Government.

Today, I feel my handicap has held me back as it has others. My neighbors are friendly enough, but it is I who must make the first move to speak to them. My co-workers do not invite me to a coffee break or to join them in lunch. I have accepted these as part of my handicap. Maybe times will change as more of the handicapped join the working force, as more of us succeed in life. For me, I must say my handicap kept me from achieving what I would have if I did not have it. It has held me back, and affected my social life. Yet, today, I don't think I would trade it for normal hearing. I have met many people I would not have met otherwise and achieved something to help others.